Media asset management — Analysis and methodology overview

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Abstract This paper highlights some of the key activities and tasks that must be conducted first, on any media asset management project, and further details the main methodology components to identify and attain the fundamental and strategic business goals.

INTRODUCTION

The implementation of a media asset management (MAM) solution supports a company's business by providing a single interface to some of its key business units. Strong methodology and project management skills are critical to successfully managing the complexity of such solutions, and keeping the project goals on track. The first phase of any MAM project, and the subject of this paper, is to identify the key strategic business goals and desired workflows, to discuss how to attain these goals, and finally to design, implement and roll out the customized technological solution that will fulfill and support these goals. Today, with MAM solutions having attained maturity, market trends and technology standards are now better established to prevent highly visible and high-risk science projects. But because of the nature of a MAM solution, custom requirements in varying degrees of complexity will always prevail, and must be clearly identified. This paper highlights some of the key tasks, activities and phases of an upfront "needs analysis" that must be conducted during pre-sales, as well as during the consulting engagement.

Although each engagement will vary in terms of approach (professional services or consulting firm), size (workgroup or enterprise), market (broadcast, marketing, or advertising) and overall strategy, the methodology remains the same. Again, the information below does not

constitute an exhaustive list of all the tasks, activities and processes required, but rather provides a high-level overview from lessons learned during the past few years. Some market segments are more advanced than others and have adopted many of the best practices outlined in this article. The goal is to educate those market segments that have not widely adopted these practices and speak the importance of them — from both the vendor and customer's perspective. The terms *vendor* and *consultant* are used interchangeably in the remaining paragraphs and can be interpreted or adapted as desired. A consultant might be referred to as a MAM vendor or as coming from a consulting firm. The term *consultant* can refer to one or more person, depending on the project size.

MAM is first and foremost about business. This statement is true for both the vendor and customer, with the goal of each being to make a profit for their respective business. Before proposing a specific system to the client, the vendor needs a detailed understanding of the customer's business drivers and current *modus operandi*.

With this in mind, proper upfront analysis in the form of consulting is vital to both the understanding of a customer's business drivers and the detailed mapping of the existing business processes. Without an intimate understanding of how a company operates, a vendor cannot be in a position to suggest a new, improved way of

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Figure 1: MAM methodology process overview

doing business. The cost associated with the implementation of a MAM solution is an investment, as it will minimize the risk of potential system redesigns post implementation, thus reducing downstream costs. Once business drivers are understood, mapping the customer's existing business processes or workflow is critical. This activity consists of a detailed workflow analysis and the assessment of both the costs and the drawbacks associated with the existing workflow and processes. Once these are understood, the "future" workflows provide the consultant with a baseline to further define and map detailed functional requirements. Finally, a technical assessment is conducted, focusing primarily on the existing technical environments (existing systems and infrastructure) and on high-level architectural requirements (detailed requirements are conducted during the design phase). When all these activities are clearly defined and agreed upon, the consultant can then start analyzing, recommending and designing the system that will fulfill the workflow and functional requirements, and ultimately meet the business goals set forth. An overview of the key goals and tasks conducted during the first phase of a MAM project are further described below. It is important to note that the strategic business

analysis usually starts before a consulting engagement, during the pre-sales process, and is a critical phase in building trust and a mutual understanding between the vendor and a prospective client.

As described in the methodology overview (Figure 1), there are three critical activities: strategic business analysis, workflow analysis, and technical requirements; all of which must be conducted prior to any design or implementation phase.

STRATEGIC BUSINESS ANALYSIS

First and foremost, the consulting team must identify the stakeholders, defined as those individuals with a vested interest in the success of the project, and select the core project team. The team must determine the strategic direction, goals and objectives for the overall MAM initiative. The most critical part of the strategic road map is identifying, prioritizing, and quantifying a client's needs, as well as identifying a client's "pain" (or outstanding issues). Then, the team must identify the business benefits and value of a MAM proposition (ie the buying vision). What are the benefits if the inefficiencies identified are eliminated? For all people impacted by these issues, determine what value

will be produced from the benefits identified. The buying vision then becomes the solution that will meet a client's needs.

Although the MAM market is maturing and more market segments have established required return on investment (ROI) levels and best practices, a prospective buyer needs help in quantifying their own ROI, and in constructing a business case that must be, in most cases, presented and sold to key business decision makers. Many buyers come from functional and technical areas, rather than finance, and are not familiar with business case preparation. Although prospective buyers with a financial background possess this expertise, they lack the technical depth to bridge the gap between product specifications and operational goals that are necessary for a valid ROI analysis. The prospective client needs the vendor's help to make a decision and justify a purchase. Early on, during the pre-sales activities (pre-consulting) a MAM vendor or consultant should already have the knowledge and experience of their prospect's needs and challenges in the following areas:

- market segments and applications;
- organization-wide issues and challenges;
- key business drivers and ROI.

A consultant should provide the preliminary foundation and roadmap for the strategic business analysis. Past experience on MAM projects has told us that most customers seek a more effective way to streamline their operations, in order to lower the cost of doing business and/or expand their business without increasing their overheads. During the consulting engagement, consultants will further refine the strategic business goals by working with all key stakeholders in conducting analyses including, but not limited to, operational cost analysis and system and maintenance cost analysis.

WORKFLOW ANALYSIS

As described in Figure 1, both the consultant and the customer will work together to identify and select the core project team and individuals that best represent each area of expertise such as, but not limited to, operations, marketing, legal, production and IT/IS. The business units and personnel involved in this activity vary greatly based on the project size and scope. The

consultant must run interview sessions with a well-defined and structured agenda. One of the critical benefits of MAM is the ability to facilitate the workflow around ingesting, managing, but most of all, moving, approving and repurposing digital assets across the organization. Although most of the MAM solution leaders provide functionalities out-of-the-box, such as, but not limited to, robust asset repositories and secure and easy access to the asset. The consultant must not only document the "as is" workflow, but identify what works and what doesn't, and assess the level of pain in order to better prioritize what will become the "future" workflow. Prior to the above and in collaboration with the customer, the consultant will identify the gaps between the current and future state of business. These potential gaps will have an impact on the overall design strategy and must be reviewed and approved before the actual architectural design of the solution is initiated (in addition to potential custom developments). During the workflow analysis process, the consultant will also help the customer define both the *business rules* and the *object model*.

Defining the object model will vary greatly from project to project. There is a wide range of "standard" models, depending on the industry (eg the Society of Motion Picture and Television Engineers (SMPTE) RP210, Dublin Core for the broadcast industry). Many vendors have implemented some of the standard models as part of their solution, while others provide customers with the ability to build their own models. In any case, a MAM vendor should share their model with their customer during the metadata review and definition sessions. In many cases, a vendor's model should at least meet the requirements for the first rollout of their MAM solution.

Identifying standard business rules is an inherent part of the workflow analysis. This activity not only helps identify who the users are, their role, and responsibilities, but defines their access rights and role within the various business processes. The consultant will identify (and recommend) business rules that will help incorporate guidelines for the management and distribution of media across the facility and within the central repository.

At some point, the consultant needs to review

and validate some of the key workflows with the customer's project team leader so as to keep the customer's expectations on track. A consultant has a wide range of tools (eg process flow diagrams) and standards annotations (eg use cases) to document existing as well as future design processes and business rules. It is important to mention that a MAM vendor should demonstrate his solution using actual business case scenarios that reflect the customer's "future" workflow, which will better enable business users to evaluate the functionality and workflow capabilities of a potential MAM solution. Such implementation could result in potentially dramatic changes in the way the customer currently operates. As a result, an effective training program must be put in place to prepare for these changes. Buy-in workshops and training recommendations should be included in the workflow analysis deliverable so that a clear migration strategy to the MAM solution is charted.

TECHNICAL REQUIREMENTS

Although this paper is not intended to cover the design phase of a MAM project, some preliminary technical requirements must be conducted during the consulting phase. The technical data gathered will provide some critical information necessary for the solution design activity. There are three main areas that must be covered during the consulting phase. First, infrastructure analysis will help the consultant document the existing data and/or video/audio network in place. Further along the design phase, this information will help ensure that the existing infrastructure can support the proposed MAM solution, and if not, recommend the scalability of this infrastructure (since the network on which the MAM system runs will need to carry significant additional traffic). Additional information may be gathered in collaboration with a customer's IT/IS department so as to further identify other infrastructure components that would have an impact on the MAM solution, such as, but not limited to, the number of target users per location (internal and external) company standards and rules, such as a specific database or platform, that are supported. Another critical area is the media/data capacity planning and migration, for which the consultant will

document the various usage and display requirements, types and formats to support, as well as the overall media lifecycle and amount of media to be ingested, managed and distributed by all the personnel using the future MAM solution. The information gathered during this phase will dictate the overall ingest (legacy archive and new assets), management, distribution strategy plan and schedule. Finally, the consultant will identify and document existing legacy systems and databases as potential interfaces with the MAM solution that may be required and therefore detailed during the design phase. There is a high probability that the MAM solution will require some level of interface with existing systems, such as databases, and therefore it is essential that all of the applications within the scope of this project be integrated properly. The consultant must understand the overall enterprise architecture. At a minimum, most customers have an existing database of all analog assets to be transferred and mapped into the new MAM system. The need for the MAM system to update external databases with new and updated metadata (eg automation systems, accounting, legal, disaster recovery systems) is often a requirement as well. During the workflow analysis, the consultant will also uncover current systems in use, and identify some potential interfacing.

At this stage of the consulting engagement, the consultant should review the key highlights of his findings, as well as the overall direction of the MAM project with the project lead and executive sponsor. All information gathered will feed directly into the findings and recommendations deliverable as well as the scope of work, system design and specifications documents etc. The deliverables will vary depending on the approach and the size of the project (workgroup vs. enterprise), but should at a minimum include the following:

- executive overview;
- findings summary and recommendations;
- proposed workflows;
- detailed functional specifications;
- proposed system architecture;
- technical requirements;
- detailed scope of work;
- project plan(s);
- costs.

Whenever appropriate, the use of visual tools (PowerPoint, Visio, Mind Mapping) for workflow and business process description is recommended: it is the most effective approach for communicating functional capabilities of the proposed solution. As mentioned, the above information will vary in the approach and format based on the project engagement type. One project might have a MAM vendor act as the prime consultant, or a customer may hire an independent consulting firm to fully research, analyze and specify the MAM solution. In most cases, the output of such an engagement results in a request for proposal (RFP) which is submitted to various MAM vendors. One should consider hiring a consulting firm for enterprise MAM projects, since the adoption of a MAM system can have a substantial impact on all areas of the business. Good consulting firms have developed a standardized approach that addresses

the people, processes, and infrastructure within the corporate framework, using strong project management, quality assurance, and change enablement methodology. While each project will require its own approach and strategy, the key activities and methods described above will remain the same for any of these approaches.

Once the functional specifications and architectural blueprint have been defined, the consultant and/or MAM vendor will enter into the design phase. Because of the very nature of MAM solutions as an interface to many parallel and subsystems, some level of customization will always be required and is perhaps the most critical design element because of its inherently high risk factor. The project will then enter in the phases of installation, testing, rollout and training, each of which will be the subject of future papers.